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PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSJ #2316/01 2961410
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 231410Z OCT 06
FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6379
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0120
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 0943
RUWDQAA/CCGDELEVEN ALAMEDA CA
RUWDQAC/COMDT COGARD WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/DIRJIATF SOUTH
RHMFIUU/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
RHQCCTB/USCGC BOUTWELL
RUEHPE/USDAO LIMA PE
RUEHSJ/USMILGP SAN JOSE CS

UNCLAS SAN JOSE 002316

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CEN, WHA/PPC, AND INL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [CS](#) [PE](#)

SUBJECT: 128 CHINESE AND PERUVIAN MIGRANTS INTERCEPTED BY
COSTA RICAN COAST GUARD

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: October 11-18, in an international, inter-agency operation involving the Costa Rican Coast Guard (SNGC), the US Coast Guard, the Peruvian Air Force, the GOCR's Directorate of Immigration (and MOTR Plan participants in Washington), 128 Chinese and Peruvian intending immigrants were rescued from their disabled vessel near Isla del Coco and returned to Peru (their departure point). The successful effort (over a Costa Rican holiday weekend) required persistent behind-the-scenes diplomacy and would have been impossible without the assistance of the USCG Boutwell, but underscored the utility of the U.S./Costa Rica Bilateral Maritime Agreement. More importantly, this good news story highlighted what the GOCR is capable of, when its limited resources are marshaled effectively. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Post received indications on October 11 that approximately 140 (later confirmed as 128) intending immigrants were stranded on a disabled 70-ft. fishing vessel, possibly of Peruvian registry (also confirmed later), and were adrift in Costa Rican territorial seas near the Isla del Coco. This information was relayed to the SNGC which immediately dispatched one of its three 82-ft. patrol vessels. The SNGC vessel made contact on October 12 and verified that the passengers aboard the vessel were intending to immigrate illegally to the U.S. The migrants apparently had recently been abandoned by their traffickers but had been adrift with little food or water for many days. Since the SNGC vessel's 10-person crew could not safely board the overcrowded fishing vessel, SNGC Director Alvarado requested Embassy assistance and dispatched a second 82-ft patrol boat.

¶3. (SBU) Post's Office of the Defense Representative (ODR) worked closely with the SNGC and the Ministry of Public Security to draft a request for assistance and to coordinate the recovery operation. Once approved (by the highest levels of the GOCR), the request was submitted on late October 12, enabling the high-endurance cutter Boutwell to be diverted from its routine counternarcotics patrol to help. The Boutwell made contact with the SNGC patrol boats, by then towing the disabled migrant vessel, (the Peruvian fishing vessel NALU) in the early hours of October 14. The crew of the Boutwell boarded the NALU and

transferred all 128 migrants (final count 71 Chinese, 57 Peruvians) to the custody of Costa Rican shipriders in accordance with the terms of the U.S./Costa Rica Bilateral Maritime Agreement. The Boutwell provided fuel to the Costa Rican patrol boats and a hot meal to the migrants, then departed for the Costa Rican port of Caldera.

¶4. (SBU) Costa Rican Immigration and Red Cross officials processed the migrants in Caldera later on October 14. Offloading the migrants from the Boutwell took approximately four hours and was accelerated by the cutter's willingness to shuttle the migrants to the pier using its own resources. The migrants were bussed to a shelter in San Jose where they received fresh clothing and minor medical attention as required. In an arrangement worked out between the two governments, the Peruvian Air Force sent two planes to San Jose to return the migrants to Lima on October 17 and 18.

¶5. (SBU) Costa Rican Immigration Director Mario Zamora told media on October 18 that the entire operation had cost the GOCCR approximately 523 million Colones (just over one million USD). Other media reports mentioned the USCG's assistance, but focused more on the SNGC's all hands effort, the dire conditions about the NALU before the migrants were rescued and the draconian terms of their transportation "contracts" which would have made them virtual slaves to their traffickers (Chinese Mafia) for years to come.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: Although this operation put a great strain on the GOCCR's resources, we are largely pleased with the way the Government met its international obligations. Likewise, the SNGC pleasantly surprised us with its ability

to get two of three operational large patrol boats on the scene within a reasonable amount of time (although they still needed fuel from the Boutwell in order to return to port). This event provided an excellent opportunity to engage senior Arias Administration decision makers in accordance with the terms of the Bilateral Maritime Agreement and to identify and correct some communication problems among those decision makers as they addressed an urgent, real-world problem.

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